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ABSTRACT

Twenty years ago the average number of individual events offered at an intercollegiate forensics tournament was two. That average has increased steadily over the years until today it is close to 10 events per individual events tournament. However, some of the so-called "new" or "experimental" events are duplicative, causing the entire expansive process to become implosive and repetitive. It appears that the only truly new, experimental event introduced in the last 20 years that does not have a clear generic antecedant to an older event is organizational communication, and that event died at birth. Physical and temporal constraints aside, the generic limitations on further experimentation into as-yet-unplowed fields seems unlikely. Virtually all of the events introduced in the last 20 years can be viewed as either parts of a larger whole or refinements of prior offerings. Thus, if experimentation is to be found at some future date, it must lie in a radical reformulation of what the larger forensic enterprise is about and should be about. (HOD)

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A PARADIGMATIC VIEW OF THE INDIVIDUAL EVENTS REVOLUTION/STRUCTURE

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A PARADIGMATIC VIEW OF THE INDIVIDUAL EVENTS REVOLUTION/STRUCTURE

Michael P. Kelley*

> Close historical investigation of a given specialty at a given time discloses a set of recurrent and quasi-standard illustrations of various theories in their conceptual, observational, and instrumental applications. These are the community's paradigms, revealed in its textbooks, lectures, and laboratory exercises. By studying them and by practicing with them, the members of the corresponding community learn their trade.
>
> Thomas S. Kuhn[1]

Almost a generation ago, in Coaching and Directing Forensics, Donald Klopf and Carroll Lahmann outlined objectives or goals for public speaking events. These goals included experience and/or training in 1) the research process, 2) subject analysis, 3) selecting and organizing material, 4) analyzing audience reactions, 5) delivering a speech, and 6) understanding of current national or international problems.[2] Several observations should be noted: First, these goals or objectives when achieved may concomitantly serve as "educational values" derived from the practice of the forensic process itself. Second, these goals and objectives are equally as applicable to the debate format as they are to the prepared events format. Thus, in answer to the question "Is a particular individual event 'educationally valuable'?" forensic professionals need look no further for criteria of values than the above stated goals and objectives of the activity. The educational value of a particular event can and should be measured in terms of how well the event meets the goals and objectives articulated by the forensic community.

The rapid growth of individual events over the past twenty years might seem to suggest that "experimental events

have the potential for improved achievement of the already-agreed-upon goals and objectives of the forensic community." The presupposition of this hypothesis rests first and foremost upon the possibility of creating and structuring "new" or "experimental" events. For, without this ability to create and structure new/experimental events, the potential enhancement of whatever "educational values" we wish to promote, is doomed to founder. It is necessary, thus to review where we have been over the past twenty years in forensics, to review what might be called the revolutionary creation of a new paradigmatic structure of forensics, namely, the individual events paradigm as it is particularly mainfested in prepared speaking events.

During this period there have been at least 22 different prepared events offered in intercollegiate forensic competition. An accompanying table lists those events alphabetically. Column 1 indicates the first year the event appears to have been offered; Column 2 indicates the last year the event appears to have been offered; and Column 3 indicates the greatest recorded frequency-of-offering for an event in any one academic year. The source of this data is as follows: the 1965-66 to 1979-80 data was obtained from the Intercollegiate Speech Tournament Results records; no data was analyzed for the 1980-81 through 1983-84 academic years; and the 1984-85 data was obtained from the "AFA Tournament Calendar 1984-85" of anticipated tournaments.[3] It should be noted that the more recent Intercollegiate Speech Tournament Results annuals recorded approximately twice the number of tournaments that the 1984-85 AFA calendar lists. Assuming that there has not been a major decline in the number of tournaments held each year since 1979-80, the most recent data may be

better interpreted in Column 4 as a "percentage of frequency."

A mere recitation of the fluctuating data over the past twenty years does not suffice to address the issue of the educational value of any of the various prepared events that have been offered in that time period. What this historical data does suggest is a quasi-free-market determination of forensic value rather than a purer "educational" value of these prepared events. As Jack Howe, long a chronicler of college speech tournament results argued some years ago ...

> The popularity of ... events has been determined solely by their frequency of appearance in tournaments. One wonders, however, if they would retain this same order if a vote were taken among the students who compete in them.[4]

Even the "free marketplace" concept of forensic value has to be tempered by several caveats. First, the existence of national individual events championships that offer less than 25% of the events that have been offered over the past 20 years obviously mitigates against the opportunities of the remaining events ever gaining any widespread currency. Second, there are clearly outer limits to the number of possible events that any given invitational tournament can realistically accommodate in a weekend tournament (the current maximum is 17 events at Southern Connecticut State University tournaments). Third, there are outer limits to the number of individual events a given competitor can participate in on a given weekend tournament. Fourth, the genre of prepared speaking events are not boundless.

Twenty years ago there were less than a handful of individual events offered in a given academic year. It must be noted, however, that this

observation is only applicable to intercollegiate forensics. Having been a high school forensic professional in northern Illinois in 1965, the author is aware that the standard smorgasbord of individual events at the high school level, at least in Illinois, was ten discrete and distinct events all sponsored annually in a District, Regional, and Statewide championship structure that, in turn, influenced the weekly high school invitational tournament offerings. Clearly, however, this panoply of individual events was far from the norm at the collegiate level at that time. ISTR suggests that the average number of individual events offered at a tournament twenty years ago was two. That average has increased steadily over the years until today where it is close to ten events per individual events tournament. Approximately half of the average ten events offered at any given tournament are prepared individual events. These 4-5 standard prepared events in turn represent less than 25% of the distinct and different prepared events that have been devised, created, and offered at various tournaments over the past 20 years.

At some point, as the table suggests, so-called "new" or "experimental" events become duplicative and the entire expansive process becomes implosive and repetitive providing mere refinements of previously offered events. The ISTR record clearly indicates that only one event included today by a national individual event tournament did not exist 20 years ago and, hence, might be labelled a successful prepared event that entered a trial market, received a modicum of support, and was eventually berthed in the National Individual Events Tournament roster of prepared events. That event is Communication Analysis. Some forensic professionals might even argue with this example by claiming, with much justification, that it is merely an expansion of the older and more restrictive Rhetorical

Criticism event. One might convincingly argue that the only truly new, experimental event introduced in the last 20 years that does not have a clear generic antecedant to an older event or a regional event is Organizational Communication. And that event died aborning.

Physical and temporal constraints aside, the generic limitations on further experimentation into as yet unplowed fields seems unlikely. Virtually all of the events introduced in the last 20 years can be viewed as either parts of a larger whole or refinements of prior offerings. Editorial Comment, for example, can be viewed as a part of the larger whole of Argument Analysis, both of which could be clustered with such related events as Communication Analysis, Forensic Criticism, Literary Criticism, and Rhetorical Criticism. Propaganda can be viewed as the counterpoint of Demagogic Speaking. The Speech to Convince, Motivative Speaking, Oratory, Persuasion, Salesmanship[sic], and Stimulative Speaking can be viewed as another cluster. Eulogy and Stump Speaking can be viewed as parts of the larger whole of Epideictic S peaking.

With this background it might be accurate to conclude that our experimentation with a variety of prepared events which began in the mid-1960s reached its zenith about five years ago and that any experimentation that may lie over the horizon would be revolutionary rather than evolutionary. The concept of paradigmatic structures is fully applicable to the issue here. The rise of individual events in competitive speaking can be viewed as a paradigmatic revolution in the academic forensic structure which overwhelmed the previous debate tournament dominant format that had emerged in the 1930s which in its turn had overwhelmed the anterior audience-centered, truly "Oxford-style" (one university team invites another

university team to debate an issue for the education and illumination of a public audience) format that existed earlier in this century.

Thus, experimentation if it is to be found at some future date, may lie in a radical reformulation of what the larger forensic enterprise is about and should be about. There is little likelihood that any true experimentation will occur in the prepared events as we know them today. That process has essentially been witnessed and concluded. At the present time we are captives of the individual events paradigm that our revolution created almost a generation ago. All that remains in this epoch is continued refinement of individual events that have already been experimented with. The revolution is over; experimentation is dead. Until the next, as yet unforeseen revolution, only refinement remains.

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[1]Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 43.

[2]Donald W. Klopf and Carroll P. Lahmann, Coaching and Directing Forensics (Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Corporation, 1967), p. 195.

[3]See AFA Newsletter, ed. James W. Pratt (Vol. 6, No. 3; June 1984), pp. 14-52.

[4]Intercollegiate Speech Tournament Results, ed. Jack H. Howe (Vol. XVIII, 1978-79), p. 106.

STATISTICS ON PREPARED EVENTS OVER THE PAST TWENTY YEARS

EVENT	Column 1 first offered	Column 2 last offered	Column 3 most offered	Column 4 84-85 %	Observations
ADS/STE	pre-65	curr.	84-85*	85 %	growth "nationals" linked
Argument Analysis	76-77	curr.	84-85	3 %	slow growth
Communication Analysis	73-74	curr.	84-85	62 %	growth "nationals" linked
Speech to Convince	77-78	curr.	84-85	3.5 %	
Demagogic Speaking	78-79	curr.	n.c.	1 %	
Editorial Comment	73-74	curr.	84-85	1 %	
Epideictic Speaking	74-75	curr.	84-85*	6 %	virtually constant after first year
Eulogy	73-74	73-74	73-74	Ø	
Expository Informative	pre-65	curr.	84-85*	97 %	growth "nationals" linked
Forensic Criticism	72-73	curr.	n.c.	.5 %	
Legal Speaking	?	curr.	?	.5 %	
Literary Criticism	76-77	curr.	84-85	3.5 %	
Manuscript Speaking	pre-65	74-75	67-68	Ø	
Motivative Speaking	77-78	78-79	n.c.	Ø	
Organizational Communication	75-76	79-80	n.c.	Ø	
Persuasion Oratory	pre-65	curr.	84-85	93 %	
Propaganda	72-73	75-76	n.c.	Ø	
R-TV Broadcasting	pre-65	curr.	77-78	3 %	appears to be declining
Rhetorical Criticism	pre-65	curr.	79-80	14 %	declining in favor of Communication Analysis
Sales	pre-65	curr.	84-85	5 %	
Stimulative Speaking	75-76	75-76	n.c.	Ø	
Stump Speaking	75-76	?	n.c.	?	

* Based upon extrapolation.

curr. = currently offered
n.c. = no change